

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

INFORMATION
Unlogged

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May 17, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Harold H. Saunders *hul*

SUBJECT: Plot Against the Libyan Government

You may recall that we mentioned to you last fall rumors of a plot by some Libyans to try to free political prisoners in Libya and launch a movement by them against the government. This has been on and off ever since, and Dick Helms in the attached described some of the later episodes. This is just to keep you informed.

The Plot: In January, the CIA [REDACTED] were tipped off that a group of European mercenaries (including British and French nationals) had been recruited to conduct a commando raid against a prison in Tripoli with the objective of freeing some 150 political prisoners, supplying them with arms and turning them loose to form the core of a counter-revolutionary force within Libya. The mercenaries were reportedly to use a ship known as La Caravelle, bearing the Panamanian flag, which was based in Bari, Italy.

CIA, closely coordinating with State, felt that all evidence pointed to the fact that the plot was unlikely to succeed in overthrowing the LARG and that we would be blamed and that would jeopardize the oil negotiations then going on. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] British mercenaries involved in the plot were warned that their cover was blown and were advised to call off the scheme. The upshot was that the mercenary leadership agreed to do so, but not without passing a warning through its contacts that another attempt would probably be made in the near future.

In mid-March, CIA was again made aware that the plot was reactivated and being augmented by the addition of a former German minesweeper, Le Chepigana, which was first located by CIA in Tangier and subsequently moved to Casablanca. La Caravelle, in the meantime, had moved to Trieste.

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[REDACTED] The Italians [REDACTED] seizing of the Caravelle and expelling her crew; the Moroccans have detained the Chepigana by launching an investigation into the ship and its crew. At this point, La Caravelle has left Trieste and is in the Ionian Sea, and Le Chepigana is still detained in Casablanca.

CIA believes that, while the plot is temporarily thwarted, this does not mean that it no longer poses a threat to the Libyan government. However, it may be abandoned for the time being. They believe that one of the leading sponsors is a Libyan exile, Omar Shalhi, a former advisor to King Idris, whose brother Aziz Shalhi was imprisoned immediately after the Qadhafi takeover in September 1969. Omar, apparently operating from Europe, is extremely wealthy and [REDACTED] that the originally promised payoff for a successfully completed raid was apparently sizeable. Recently, though, there was a report saying that Omar Shalhi may himself be calling the operation off since, despite his sizeable investments in crews and ships, the plot has repeatedly failed.

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1/SENSITIVE